

Pathways to Adult Life



Aaliya recent graduate

Life is full of transitions for all of us. The most significant, however, may be the transition from high school to adult life. What will I do? Where will I live? Will I work or go onto further education? All young adults ask these questions, and it is not any different for young adults with disabilities and their families. The answers to these questions may be different for an individual with a developmental disability, but the questions and their importance are the same.

Andrew working at Cosimo's Pizza Cafe



HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

Historically, the Division of Developmental Disabilities' (DDD) system of services placed a large emphasis on adult residential care and had not focused adequate attention on those young adults with developmental disabilities who, at 22, were no longer eligible for special education services. Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476) required transition services be provided based on student

needs and took into account student interests and preferences, little substantive work was being done in this area. Day programming or employment options had not been put in place or funded, and many of these young adults were at home with their families with little or no support. DDD recognized that this lack of transition planning left families without direction and many in crisis.

In 2002, DDD began a major System's Change that made a fundamental shift in service delivery away from group homes and other more restrictive placements, toward the development of an array of supports and services for individuals and their families living at home or independently in the community. Self-direction and determining the wants and needs of the individual and their families became a core component of the System's Change.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities Outreach to Families

As part of the overall System's change DDD focused priority on the transition population. DDD has committed to providing information, education and ongoing communication to young adults, their families and school personnel in developing more individualized transition planning.

Beginning in 2004, DDD's new direction formally addressed the needs of young adults with disabilities through the following:

- Creation of a Director of Transition position to oversee this new direction and insure priority is maintained.
- Identification of \$5,000,000 (million) as a line item in the DDD budget for Transition.
- Contact with all 2004 Graduates and their families to provide supports and/or services.
 - 125 individuals statewide waiting for Day Activities/Programs were served.
- Development of interagency partnerships with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), the Division of Disability Services (DDS), the Department of Education (DOE), and The Boggs Center (NJ's University Center for Excellence-UMDNJ) to provide a series of information and education sessions to assist families/individuals with disabilities in making informed choices.

SELF-DIRECTION

Self-direction is critically important for young adults transitioning from high school to adult life. Research has supported the view that self-direction or self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes (Wehmeyer and Swartz, 1997). Self-direction is a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that allows a person to be more goal oriented, self-regulated and autonomous. The skills leading to enhanced self-direction, like goal setting, problem solving and decision making, enable people with developmental disabilities and their families to assume greater responsibility and control.

For more Information contact:

Brian receiving vocational training at Chelsea Assisted Living Facility



Lorraine D'Sylva-Lee, Director of Transition @ 1-800-FSC-NJ10
email: pathways@dhs.state.nj.us
New Jersey Department of Human Services/
Division of Developmental Disabilities
www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/index.html